

Lehmann, Chris. "Homo Americanus: Collected Works." *Bookforum* (April/May 2016): 50 [ill.]

## BOOKFORUM

**HOMO AMERICANUS: COLLECTED WORKS** BY RAYMOND PETTIBON; EDITED BY ULRICH LOOCK AND HARALD FALCKENBERG NEW YORK: DAVID ZWIRNER BOOKS. 692 PAGES. \$65.



Raymond Pettibon, *No title (Follow the bouncy...)*, 2002, pen and ink on paper, 15 x 15 1/2".

**MY COPY** of Raymond Pettibon's mammoth new anthology of drawings, *Homo Americanus: Collected Works*, sat untended atop a week's worth of review copies until I took a good look at its cover. The image is a classic Pettibon, save for a few flourishes of watercolor: It shows a mohawked, guitar-wielding SoCal punk rocker of 1980s vintage, sporting a rainbow-colored Black Flag T-shirt. But on closer inspection, I realized that the appendage caressing the ax's neck isn't the punk's left hand at all—it is, instead, an enormous erect penis. Since there's a thirteen-year-old girl in my house, I smuggled the book into my study, in a furtive, half-sweaty rush.

This is an entirely fitting reaction to Pettibon's muse, one that transported me back to my long-ago initial encounter with his work on the covers of the lo-fi hardcore LPs released on the SST label in the early '80s, the height of LA's punk insurgency. Pettibon's dark, confrontational art always feels vaguely illicit—as it should, given how completely it levels the decorous conventions of even the most transgressive reaches of the art world. Pettibon's drawings—organized here into thirty-two topical chapters, each opening with an excerpt from interviews between Pettibon and curator Ulrich Loock—run the gamut from mordant SoCal-in-decay fare (e.g., the drawings under the chapter heading "Helter Skelter" and in Pettibon's first zine-comic, the richly demented *Captive Chains*) to childhood obsessions ("Train," "Gumby," "Baseball") to geopolitical disaster ("Mushroom Cloud," "Shock and Awe," "Iraq War [Since 2003]") to personal trauma ("Heart"—cyclonic word-and-ink productions that stem from Pettibon's own heart surgery). Indeed, seeing all this ambitious, restlessly self-interrogating work brought together in one place impresses viewers with how diligently Pettibon keeps his grimly witty mastery of word and image from descending into all-out nihilism. No opportunistic doomster with an MFA would produce a series of dramatic drawings teasing out the Burkean idea of the sublime in the act of surfing, and no icon-smashing know-it-all would produce the compassionate character studies in Pettibon's baseball chapter. Though, full disclosure: One of these entries also randomly features an erect penis. —CHRIS LEHMANN